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Post-Tribune

For some, long wait ahead

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/1167772,floodcleanup.article>)

September 17, 2008

Post-Tribune staff report

LAKE STATION -- Anne Gualandi needed a canoe Tuesday to escape the surging waters of Deep River that filled her neighborhood on the city's west side.

"The river was in back of my house. But on Monday it looked someone moved it in front of my house and down the street," said Gualandi, who took refuge at an American Red Cross shelter set up in the Lake Station Civic Center after water began filling her home in the 2800 block of Wyoming Street.

The shelter, expected to remain open for at least 10 days, was home to 86 Lake Station residents displaced after Deep River pushed over its banks following storms spawned by Hurricane Ike.

Hundreds of others moved in with friends and relatives.

"It's absolutely a disaster area," Lake Station Mayor Keith Soderquist said of the flooding that affected areas between 27th and 29th avenue on the south, Wyoming to State on the east, and 23 to 24th Avenue on the north.

Soderquist said emergency personnel spent the day trying to rescue people trapped by the flood water, which reached the second floor of some homes.

HOBART

Lake George reached a record level of 22-foot and 2-inches, completely immersing portion of the downtown lakefront and forcing the police department to relocate its communications system.

Police Chief Rod Gonzalez said lake water started flooding the station about 1 p.m. Sunday despite the sandbags city workers and local volunteers had piled up to protect the station.

Gonzalez said 911 dispatchers moved to a mobile command center the Lake County sheriff's department provided.

The mobile center was still parked in front of the station late Tuesday even though chief dispatchers had returned to the station.

The Hobart library and several downtown businesses and apartment building also were flooded.

The lake's high waters drew scores of spectators.

"I've lived in Hobart all my life and I've never seen it this bad," said Tom McClaran as he stood along the flooded downtown lakefront.

"City workers have done a tremendous job," City Council David Vinzant said as he surveyed the flood area.

The city was fortunate, Vinzant said, because the downtown area did not experience any power outages. Several homeowners reported getting water in their basements.

GRIFFITH

Evacuation warnings for the area near Cline Avenue and River Road have been overstated, officials said, although the town is watching its section of the Little Calumet River very closely.

Businesses in the area were advised to get any vehicles and heavy equipment out of the area, and transportation company Bulkmatic, which has its headquarters on Cline, is sandbagging its premises, said Town Council President Rick Ryfa.

But no immediate evacuations are in effect for the area, Ryfa said.

Currently, the water level is four feet from the top of Griffith's levee portion after rising eight inches overnight.

"Engineers with the Army Corps of Engineers are telling me they don't anticipate it going over, but that could change," Ryfa said. "If there's a problem, we'll start going door-to-door and letting people know to evacuate."

MUNSTER

Town Councilman Mike Mellon caught the ire of residents who said the town did too little to prepare for the rains which deluged the area last weekend.

Following a meeting with Gov. Mitch Daniels at Munster High School, homeowners took out their frustrations on Mellon, who stuck around to answer questions.

Several people who live on the Munster side of Hart Ditch or the Little Calumet River said they watched with alarm as the water rose Saturday and town workers did nothing to reinforce the banks.

John Klos, who lives with his wife, Vanessa, in the 7800 block of Harrison Avenue, was particularly angered by the fact Hammond workers realized the imminent danger Saturday and tried to protect their residents.

"We could see crews on the Hammond side of the river sandbagging Saturday," Klos said. "Meanwhile, nobody was doing anything on the Munster side. We tried to call the town to get sand delivered, and they wouldn't help us."

Mellon insisted town officials did everything they could.

"If you didn't see town employees in one area, that's because we were working on sandbagging somewhere else," he said.

Mellon urged residents still not back in their homes to contact the town to set up a time to go check out the structures with inspectors. He said people should either call the town hall at 836-8810 or come in and give their addresses and cell phone numbers.

The town will then call residents to meet the inspectors, who will check houses for structural damage, gas leaks and other potential hazards.

If the inspectors deem a house safe they will "green flag" it, and residents will be allowed to move back in.

Houses with problems will get a red flag, residents will be allowed to collect some belongings but will then need to leave until it is deemed safe.

The Lake County Health Department, meanwhile, will administer 100 tetanus shots in Munster Wednesday, Mellon said.

Anyone who has been walking through flood water who has not had a tetanus shot in more than 10 years should consider a tetanus shot. So should people with open sores who has been walking through flood water, regardless of the last time they had tetanus shots.

A time and place for the shots has not been set.

Mellon urged residents to check the town Web site, Munster.org, to find specifics on the shot clinic.

CHESTERTON

After checking in with local officials Tuesday, Gov. Mitch Daniels met privately with the family of two men who died trying to save a 10-year-old boy from a rain-choked ditch.

Mark Thanos and his father, John Thanos, were killed early Sunday when they jumped into the Pope-O'Conner Ditch. The boy survived.

"We had five people die downstate during the flooding in June, but those were pure acts of God, people hit by tree limbs and the like," Daniels said. "This was people trying to do the right thing."

LAKE COUNTY

Lake County Emergency Management Director Jodi Richmond said the county has received reports of flood damage to 500 homes countywide, which have displaced more than 100 people.

Flood waters appeared to continue to threaten parts of Munster, Hammond and Gary even after a second day without rain, Richmond said.

"It's just the way the water flows in the Little Calumet and the Kankakee rivers," she said. "Some places are going to be threatened while the rain event is happening, some are going to have more problems when the water is going down in other places."

Damage appeared more extensive than in 2007, when storms caused flooding and extensive wind damage, Richmond said. Residents are urged to file flood damage reports, which will help the county make the case for state and federal relief funds, with their local governments or by calling Emergency Management at 755-3549.

Richmond admitted that line will likely be tied up for days.

"Just keep calling," she said. "Most of the the local towns will have form soon."

County workers also will distribute forms at emergency shelters, she said.

The county was to post a map of road closures on its Web site by this morning. Check at www.lakecountyin.org, Richmond said.

GARY

Police blocked Grant Street on both sides of the Interstate 94 overpass Tuesday as water from the Little Calumet River continued to overflow onto the streets and into nearby businesses.

Most stores south of the Borman Expressway were closed by afternoon while National Guardsmen stacked sandbags along the levee in an attempt to hold back the water, which was expected to continue to rise throughout the day.

Homes east of Broadway along 33rd Avenue were evacuated after residents discovered water was coming up through manholes on city streets.

"We focusing on saving lives right now. We can't protect the property, water goes where it wants to go," Emergency Management Agency Cmdr. Gary Carter said.

The city is using all its barricades to block roads with enough water to cause problems, police said.

Traffic along Broadway, meanwhile, spiked when Gary's main strip became one of few options for motorists trying to cross Interstate 80/94.

Cars, trucks and semi-tractor trailers crawled along Broadway's northbound lanes, especially between 25th and 35th avenues.

Congestion in the southbound lanes began as far north as the Indiana Toll Road's Broadway exit.

MERRILLVILLE

Barricades are up north of 57th Avenue between Harrison and Cleveland Streets, and along the 5900 block of Grant Street near Meadowdale subdivision.

And that's basically all the town can do, besides wait for water in those flooded spots to come down.

"There's no where to pump the water to," said Bruce Spires, director of the town's Public Works Department.

The water has receded a bit allowing the town to open up 57th and 61st avenues. But evacuated residents at Meadowdale do not know when they can go back home.

Mae White and her husband, Charles, saw the rising water completely surround their home Sunday, and had to be evacuated on a boat handled by Ross Township firefighters.

"When I looked out, I just became so panicked and stressed," Mae White, 73, said about the rising water. "I sort of lost it there for a minute."

The Broadfield subdivision, which flooded in January of this year and in August 2007, fell victim to massive flooding from the heavy rains. In March, an engineering report concluded surrounding retention ponds were too small for the area, but repairs had yet to be completed.

Near Broadfield, 93rd Avenue between Broadway and Mississippi Street is the only major road in town still closed, Spires said. It will likely remained closed for a few more days as water gets pumped out around the clock

Beginning today, residents can dispose destroyed materials at Dumpsters between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. at the Public Works Department, 12 W. 73rd Ave., and behind the Pruzin Community Center, 5750 Tyler Place.

Allied Waste will continue picking up trash, and will accept rolled up or tied up carpeting weighing less than 50 pounds, one large item such as a piece of furniture or appliance, and unlimited items placed in bags or containers. The Public Works Department will pick up any other materials from residences curbs.

SCHERERVILLE

Only one road remained closed in town Tuesday afternoon as town inspectors began knocking on doors to assess damage.

At 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, Kennedy Avenue near Division Street reopened, said Jeff Huet, director of Schererville's Public Works Department. Eagle Ridge Drive behind Home Depot, near 213th Street, remained closed, but Town Manager Bob Volkmann was hopeful they could open it up to traffic Tuesday night.

Volkmann said inspectors from Schererville's Building and Fire Departments completed a check-in at the Auburn Meadows subdivision, where residents primarily reported soaked carpeting and furniture.

And in Pine Island, seven homes remained without power Tuesday after transformers became totally submerged. Volkmann said water is being pumped out now so that NIPSCO could go in and assess the situation.

Volkmann said anyone who sustained damage from the floods should call Town Hall, 322-2211, and ask to speak to someone in the Building Department.

DYER

Town workers Tuesday afternoon were able to re-start two lift stations that failed during the weekend storms, exacerbating the impact of the heavy rains, said Town Manager Jim Neeb.

Neeb said some 500 homes were damaged by flooding, but that the town has gone from the responding to the rising waters to cleaning up the damage.

"I think the streets are empty," Neeb said. "We can get around the entire town."

The town will allow residents to put trash and debris in the streets, and workers will put Dumpsters in hard-hit areas.

HIGHLAND

Town officials were closely watching a 100-foot-long pile of sandbags along the Little Calumet Tuesday, hoping that slowly receding flood waters would not breach the makeshift dike, said Ken Mika, director of operations for the Highland Fire Department.

"We're pretty much holding our breath," said Mika, recalling heavy storm damage in the town in 2006.

Some 150 homeowners reported storm sewers backing up into their basements and two reported foundation walls collapsing. In 2006, more than 20 homes suffered foundation damage.

The Spring Street Ditch overflowed its banks, flooding the Highland Grove Shopping center on Main Street and U.S. 41. NIPSCO crews cut power to the mall as well, hoping to prevent electrical shorts, although some stores remained open, including Target. Due to the water in the parking lot, spaces for customers were at a premium, with only a fraction of the regular lot available for cars.

Overall, Mika said the town was faring better than 2006, which he credited to homeowners as much as to improvements to the levy system undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers.

CROWN POINT

Broadway was still covered in water in some spots, but passable, a spokesman for Mayor David Uran's said Tuesday.

"We're having periodic road closures East Greenview Place over the next 3 to 5 days," spokesman Keith Stevens said.

The closures will shut down East Greenview Place between Driftwood Trail and Stillwater Parkway at certain times while the city's engineering department evaluates the structural integrity of the road, Stevens said. A portion of the rip-rap support of the embankment washed away during the weekend flooding.

Stevens said the city had no major road closures in Crown Point and no reported injuries, although the fire department made several rescues of drivers whose vehicles were stranded in high water.

"We escaped with relatively minor circumstances, but I would hate to venture a guess as to how many flooded basements we have," he said. "We're making list as people report them."

Stevens said there were no reports of major structural damage.

LOWELL

Lowell Police Sgt. Todd Angerman said there were no road closures as of Tuesday. Sandbags that had been placed around a bridge at the American Legion south of Commercial Avenue and on Halstead Street had been picked up Tuesday morning. Flooding at the bridge was due to a water main break, Angerman said.

Staff writers Lori Caldwell , Piet Levy, Jon Seidel, Andy Grimm, John Byrne, Karen Snelling, and Diane Krieger Spivak and correspondent Michelle Quinn contributed to this report.

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Post-Tribune

Confusing road closures will continue

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/1167834.flood-roads.article>)

September 17, 2008

By Erik Potter Post-Tribune staff writer

Traffic crawled through Northwest Indiana on Tuesday as cars and trucks attempted to navigate around still-flooded highways.

Closures on Interstate 80/94 (also called the Borman Expressway through much of Lake County) and Interstate 65 were expanded overnight, forcing more traffic onto local roads.

The eastbound Borman was closed between the Illinois State Line and Ripley Street in Lake Station, while westbound was closed from Indiana 49 in Chesterton to the Illinois line.

The Indiana Department of Transportation announced an agreement Tuesday afternoon with the Indiana Toll Road Concession Corp. to waive tolls on the Indiana Toll Road between the Westpoint Toll Plaza near the Illinois/Indiana state line and the Portage Toll Plaza while the Borman is closed.

INDOT spokeswoman Angie Fegaras said that flooding onto the Borman at Chase Street was caused by Gary not closing off and sandbagging Chase Street in time.

The new \$215 million Little Calumet levee project runs through that area, but there is about a 40 foot wide gap in the levee that makes room for Chase Street to cross the river. In a flooding situation, Fegaras said, Gary is responsible for closing that road off and filling in that gap with sand bags.

Gary spokeswoman LaLosa Burns said that that didn't start happening until Monday.

I-65 was closed to northbound traffic from U.S. 24 in southern Jasper County up to the Borman.

Closure at U.S. 24 was ordered by the Emergency Evacuation Operation Center and the Indiana State Police to help reduce congestion on U.S. 30, which has born the brunt of the diverted traffic from the Borman.

Major flooding was still a problem at the intersection of

I-65 and I-80/94, where the Little Calumet and Deep rivers meet. The ramps connecting northbound I-65 to Borman were still "completely underwater," according to INDOT.

Few major north-south routes that crossed the Borman remained open, with Calumet Avenue, Kennedy Avenue, Grant Street and Ripley Street all blocked off near the Little Calumet River.

Traffic, funneled onto Indianapolis Boulevard and Broadway, which remained open, crept along.

Traffic on Indiana 51 in downtown Hobart was so heavy that it added an extra hour to a commute through town.

Other road closures throughout the region are as follows:

n Northbound I-65 between U.S. 24 in southern Jasper County and I-80/94. The road is closed to all traffic, including local traffic. Southbound I-65 is still open south of U.S. 30.

n Eastbound I-80/94 between the Illinois line and Ripley Street in Lake Station.

n Westbound I-80/94 between Indiana 49 in Chesterton to the Illinois state line.

n Indiana 2 between I-65 and U.S. 231 in southern Lake and Porter counties.

n Ripley Street between Ridge Road and Fairview in Lake Station.

n Broadway between 101st Avenue and 93rd Avenue in Crown Point.

n Indiana 55 between Shelby in Lake County and Thayer in northern Newton County.

Complete list of closings

Hobart

73rd Street (Old Lincoln Highway) from DeKalb Street to Lake Park Avenue (Indiana 51).

Wisconsin Street from Third Street to Eighth Street.

37th Avenue from Colorado to Colonial Drive.

All of Fifth Street, 33rd Avenue, and Front Street.

The intersections of Sixth Street and Gilbert Court; Eighth Street and Ash Street; Cleveland Avenue and Indiana Street; and 83rd Avenue and Grand Boulevard.

The bridges on 3rd Street and Arizona Street.

Hammond

Only two north-south roads crossing the Little Calumet River are open to traffic, which are Indianapolis Boulevard and Hohman Avenue.

Calumet Avenue is closed south of 175th Street; Columbia Avenue south of 175th Street; Northcote Avenue south of River Drive; and Kennedy Avenue south of 173th Avenue.

Highland

Kennedy Avenue, north of Duluth Avenue.

Munster

45th Avenue between Southwood Drive and Calumet Avenue is closed due to BP pipeline repair.

Other roads closed from flooding include Calumet Avenue north of Ridge Road; Columbia Avenue north of Ridge Road; Northcote Avenue north of Ridge Road; as well as local roads serving the neighborhoods north of Ridge Road and east of Manor Avenue.

Gary

Gary has closed several north-south roads that cross the Little Calumet River, including:

Grant Street from 25th Avenue to 35th Avenue; Martin Luther King Drive from 21st Avenue to 33rd Avenue; Georgia from 25th Avenue to 35th Avenue; Clark Road from 27th Avenue to Ridge Road; Harrison Street from 27th Avenue to 35th Avenue; and Colfax Street from 27th Avenue to 35th Avenue.

Lake Station

Many neighborhood roads in Lake Station are closed due to severe flooding, up near roof lines in some areas.

On the west end of town, a swath of roads are closed off. Closures are bordered by Wyoming Street on the west, 29th Avenue to the south, State Street to the east, and 27th Avenue to the north.

The neighborhood just north of I-80/94 is also blocked off due to flooding, which includes 24th Avenue, 23rd Court and 23rd Avenue.

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Post-Tribune

Gridlock hampers relief

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/1165732,deluge.article>)

September 16, 2008

Post-Tribune staff report

HOBART

Lake George became a virtual tourist attraction Monday as rising waters rushed over and damaged the Third Street Bridge.

As waters flowed north, a sinkhole formed and swept away a portion of the road and sidewalk, drawing fascinated observers who ventured downtown for photographs.

Judy Gross, of Sewing by Judy, received the dreaded phone call from Hobart Mayor Brian Snedecor Monday morning. Snedecor told Gross that Lake George flooding was compromising the bridge near her business as water rushed over it.

Gross and her friends hastily removed all her sewing items and equipment.

Gross emerged from the business, took a look at the water and broke down in tears. Friends rushed to comfort her but a Hobart ambulance was called to the scene when she felt light-headed.

The water reached the back of the buildings on the east and west sides of the lake including the Lake County Public Library and Chase Bank branch on Main Street. It also was dangerously close to the Hobart Police Department.

About 1 a.m. Monday, water began seeping into the Lakeview Apartments, just east of Lake George on Main Street. About 20 residents were evacuated from their ground floor apartments, said maintenance supervisor Eric Kratochvil.

"We had about six to eight inches of water after that," Kratochvil said.

He said the water surge blew out the rear glass windows of the Chase Bank on Main Street. Hobart schools were closed Monday, because several roads remained impassable due to high water, including Ridge Road east of Wisconsin Street, Old Ridge Road just west of Main Street, Cleveland Street west of Indiana Street and 73rd Avenue west of Indiana 51.

Water rose up close to the goalposts at the Brickie Bowl, meanwhile, and coaches and team members used a boat to remove equipment from the stadium's equipment building where water neared the roof level.

Friday's home game against Andrean has been moved to Portage High School to allow time for the Brickie Bowl to dry out. The low-lying Hobart gridiron sits below the railroad tracks to its south and adjacent to Duck Creek.

The heavy rains rerouted the water into the arena's perfectly shaped bowl, which is marking its final season of use as the Hobart school district plans to open a new high school and football field on 10th Street next year.

Colton Halterman, 18, a senior who plays right guard for the Brickies, stood on the railroad tracks with a camera and eyed his football field.

"Last year during the flooding, you could see the crown of the field. Not this time," he said.

The final regular season game at the Brickie Bowl is scheduled for Oct. 17. School officials were hopeful the field would dry out by then and sod damage would be minimal.

"We won't know until it recedes," said Gordon Sullivan, a maintenance worker.

Sullivan said many expensive pieces of equipment such as mowers and chalk line machines were removed from the equipment building Saturday in anticipation of the deluge. He said NIPSCO shut all the field's power off on Sunday.

MUNSTER

Tess Beredos stepped gingerly from a flat-bottomed Indiana State Police boat near Broadmoor and Calumet avenues Monday afternoon, her gaze vacant.

The flood had exacted a terrible toll even before she and her husband, James, were forced to concede the water lapping at their kitchen door made it impossible for them to wait out this calamity as they had others in their home of 42 years on Jefferson Avenue.

"Yesterday afternoon we learned my nephew and his father drowned in a ditch in Chesterton," Beredos said. "We have had the most horrible 24 hours."

Mark Thanos, 48, and John Thanos, 74, died trying to save a 10-year-old boy who had fallen into the Pope-O'Conner Ditch.

Clutching her purse and a plastic bag filled with prescription medication, Beredos said she wanted to remain in her home, but they lost phone service Monday.

"We're going to get a ride to stay with the rest of the family," she said quietly.

Munster officials were trying to convince residents of 448 homes under a mandatory evacuation order that their homes are safe.

"It's so hard to tell somebody to keep away from their own home," Town Council President Helen Brown said. "Our police are patrolling these neighborhoods in boats, as are the state police, and we can't have people coming in and out of the houses, because how do we know who they are?"

Another 700 homes are in an area designated a "suggested evacuation" zone, Brown said.

"If people can get to a computer, we're asking them to go to www.munster.org where we will post updates," Brown said.

LAKE STATION

A dozen families on the Gary-Lake Station border loaded only their most precious belongings before climbing into boats Monday morning, leaving behind homes waist-deep in water.

"My sister knocked on my door this morning, and when I got out of bed I was standing in water," Pam Robb said minutes after she and her dog left her home. Gary and Lake Station fire departments led the evacuation of homes on both sides of Clay Street south of Burns Ditch.

While firefighters, many wearing dive suits, and Gary Emergency Management Agency workers led the evacuation, water continued to rise on Clay Street.

"It wasn't like this when we got here, but look at it now," one Lake Station firefighter said, gesturing to the ankle-deep water washing over Clay Street.

Robb said the water has never reached these levels in the 21 years she's lived there.

"Last year it got into my yard, but not my house," she said.

Lake Station firefighters also evacuated families from the Riverside Mobile Home Park at 29th Avenue and Oklahoma Street.

MERRILLVILLE

The Town Council held an emergency session at noon Monday to discuss removal of flood-damaged household items, including carpeting, appliances and furniture.

Allied Waste, the town's waste hauler, had been making the rounds of municipalities all day to coordinate placement of dumpsters. Dumpsters will be placed at 13 W. 73rd Ave. and behind the Pruzin Center at 57th and Tyler later this week.

The town plans to issue a press release to announce which days. Allied's district municipal services manager James Metros encouraged the town to apply for FEMA funding.

"FEMA funds are not the easiest to get, but this is associated with Hurricane Ike, which was a national disaster," Metros said.

Town officials said they had no idea when the floodwaters would recede, since the town has no way to pump stormwater.

"Innsbrook County Club is now just a building in the middle of Turkey Creek," said Director of Public Works Bruce Spires.

Broadfield subdivision, at 93rd Avenue east of Broadway, remained evacuated Monday. Woodlane Drive, northwest of 57th Avenue and Harrison Street was under five feet of water, officials said.

HAMMOND

With firefighters and public works crews monitoring the flood control walls along the river in Hammond, Mayor Tom McDermott Jr. was fairly optimistic the flooded areas in his city would not get completely inundated.

But Monday afternoon, McDermott still urged residents to stay with families or in shelters for the time being.

"We're asking people to stay away, especially if you're not mobile," McDermott said. "If you're a senior citizen, a child, or if you're disabled, and there's a substantial breach in the levees, then you aren't going to have much time to get out."

"A few hundred" people were staying at the Hammond Civic Center, McDermott said, where the Red Cross and other volunteers were providing food and bedding.

The Hammond Transit System, meanwhile, was called to help evacuate people who were staying at the hotels near the Indiana Welcome Center just south of the Borman on Kennedy. Transit Director Keith Matasovsky said that Hammond used one 40-passenger bus for about four hours to ferry evacuees from a temporary shelter in Highland to the Hammond Civic Center.

"Because of the humidity and rain and all that, the defrosters in the bus weren't working. ... I had to rip off my T-shirt to wipe off the windows for the driver," Matasovsky said.

Regular city routes for Hammond were curtailed Monday as flood waters prevented bus service from crossing the Little Calumet River into Highland or Munster, including stops at the Hammond Clinic and Community Hospital in Munster.

East Chicago and Gary reported normal service by Monday afternoon with only minor route disruptions during the day.

GARY

State-owned trucks brought five loads of sand to the city's police and fire training facility at 35th Avenue and Chase Street, where workers began filling sand bags.

"We're going to start using them right here. The water is bad here," EMA Director Gary Carter said.

Although Martin Luther King Drive was closed between 21st and 35th avenues, several cars stalled in deep water on both sides of the Interstate 94 overpass. EMA workers were summoned to assist motorists trapped in their cars after they drove around posted barriers.

Police supervisors called for additional markers to block the road. Georgia Street was similarly flooded along the path of the Little Calumet River Monday, police said.

VALPARAISO

Most of the streets in Valparaiso were open to traffic again by Monday afternoon, but officials then found themselves dealing with a sinkhole and another road section that could collapse.

Bill Hanna, city manager, said a sinkhole had formed on Horseprairie Avenue inbetween U.S. 30 and Indiana 2. A section of Porter County Road 400N inbetween Indiana 130 and Froberg Road was also in danger of giving way, he said.

Business owners along the northside of Calumet Avenue dried out Monday after some of their offices got flooded twice during the weekend.

Jack Richey, owner of Billy Jack's Cafe, said he had just about finished remodeling his restaurant after a flood a month ago when his store got a couple inches of water again this weekend. He estimates about a loss of \$100,000 overall.

"The question is whether to stay here," he said. "Is it going to happen every time it rains a couple of inches?"

Richey said his store had never flooded for the 16 years he's been there until last year, after a commercial development went in across the street. Hanna said engineers aren't sure yet what has caused the floodings and will look into the problem.

PORTAGE

Michelle Pruznak and her husband spent Monday cleaning out their Brookview Estates home of the water and sewage that flowed in during the weekend.

The couple and their two children were finally able to leave their Kingman Avenue home Monday morning after they couldn't find anyone to help them to the end of the flooded street.

"We were stuck here last night," Pruznak said.

She and her husband spent Monday tearing out the carpet of the bottom level of their tri-level house. They're wearing masks because of the smell from the sewage, she said.

Not everyone in Portage is able to start the clean-up process, though.

Christopher Asbridge said most of the homes on his street, Pennsylvania Avenue, and other surrounding streets were fighting drains sending water back into their homes. Asbridge said he has been pumping water since Sunday morning, but the water was still coming in as of Monday afternoon.

Most of the main thoroughfares did reopen, though. The only main road that was still closed was Samuelson Road north of Central Avenue.

CHESTERTON

The street commissioner wants parents to warn youngsters to stay away from ponds, drains and culverts in severe weather.

John Schnadenberg said he had to chase two teenagers out of a waist-deep retention pond near the old Jewel store on Indian Boundary Road late Sunday.

Given that two people had already drown earlier in the day trying to save a child who had fallen into a rain-swollen ditch, Schnadenberg said it should be obvious how dangerous these situations can be. He also warned bold motorists it's not only a bad idea to drive through, it's illegal.

Schnadenberg said countless drivers broke the law when they drove around barriers and barricades to drive through dangerously flooded streets. He even had to push a sports utility vehicle out of deep water when it stalled.

PORTER COUNTY

Workers filled and distributed more than 10,000 sandbags for residents who needed to stem the weekend's rising waters.

Tom Clements, an employee of the Porter County Emergency Management, said the sandbags are available at the county highway department on Indiana 2.

Many of the sandbags went south, where the National Guard aided in sandbagging along the Kankakee River. Porter County employees, inmates from the jail worked with the Department of Natural Resources and the state Department of Homeland Security during the storm, he said.

JASPER COUNTY

The north portion of Jasper County was declared a state emergency as workers raced to fill sandbags for residents along the Kankakee River. Workers filled between 7,000 and 8,000 sandbags Monday and an additional 10,000 were expected to be delivered Tuesday morning as the Kankakee River continued to climb, according Gail Ackerman, assistant county superintendent.

"The river is still rising and they think the worst is yet to come," Ackerman said.

A number of roads near the river have been closed with as much as 11½ feet of water covering them. Ackerman said the most traveled road effected is 400 West, north of 1700 North.

The roadway, which is now closed due to flooding, has been used as an alternate route into Porter County since Indiana 49 was closed for bridge painting and Baum's Bridge Road was also closed for maintenance.

Sanelli said most of the roads that are closed in Jasper County are also closed on the Porter County side.

She expects the closures will last through at least today. While the rain has stopped, the river is expected to continue its climb as water funnels its way through drainage culverts and creeks, she said.

LOWELL

Homes were evacuated on Halstead Street and Lincoln Street, and equipment had to be removed from the town garage south of Lincoln after before floodwaters rose, said Building Administrator Wilbur Cox.

Volunteers had built a wall of sandbags between the American Legion and the Cedar Creek bridge south of Commercial Avenue Sunday but the legion sustained flooding anyway, Cox said. At 2 p.m. Monday water was still hitting the bottom of the bridge.

"The sandbags will remain and the bridge won't be open again until the county highway inspects it," Cox said.

HEBRON

The rebuilt Indiana 2 and drainage improvements did as required during the weekend storms.

"The new part of Main Street was great," City employee Pat Fry said. "There was no standing water."

However, the section from DeMotte State Bank south was closed for work, and the detours flooded, blocking traffic in or out from the south. Locust Street and a few other streets flooded up to sidewalks, and city workers were cleaning up Monday.

Outside of city limits, things got worse, Fry said. Besides four flooded homes, "our industrial park was all under water," she said.

Despite fast drainage, the auto shop still had water up to its windows Monday.

KOUTS

Weekend storms proved too much for the waste water treatment plant, which typically handles 200,000 gallons of sewage. Plant operators had to dump about 100,000 gallons of overflow into Bankie Ditch.

"It's not concentrated raw sewage," operation manager Nathan Howell said. "But it's untreated water."

The plant, designed to handle a peak flow of 900,000 gallons a day, processed 1.4 million gallons Sunday. Crews were still trying to catch up on Monday.

Howell blamed sump pumps tied into sewer lines for the excess. The town also had a few areas with standing water and some basement flooding.

South Shore South Shore railroad cars had to slow down to 5 mph near Gary's Miller neighborhood because of flood waters that pooled six inches above the train tracks. The slowdown resulted in South Shore service that was as much as 15 and 20 minutes late, each way, said John Parsons, spokesman for the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, which operates the South Shore.

Parsons said he expected the water could remain above the tracks into the middle of the week, keeping service times from returning to normal.

Indiana Toll Road Traffic flowed freely on the Indiana Toll Road, which INDOT designated as its official alternate route for long-distance east-west travellers.

Matt Pierce, spokesman for the Indiana Toll Road Concessions Corp. said that all extra toll operators were called into duty to keep the extra traffic moving. Every toll lane was being used at the Westpoint toll plaza near the Illinois/Indiana border, as well as every lane at the Portage toll plaza.

"Expect no backups on the road," Pierce said. "People can expect to move through freely."

INTERSTATE 65

I-65 was shut down between U.S. 24 in southern Jasper County and the Borman Expressway. I-65 closures started with the ramp connecting northbound I-65 to westbound Borman, beginning at 10 a.m. Monday.

INDOT expanded the closure from between U.S. 30 and Borman by the afternoon. Starting at 5 p.m., state police were diverting all nonlocal traffic on northbound I-65 onto U.S. 24. As of 6 p.m. Monday, local traffic still had access on I-65 as far north as U.S. 30.

GOV. DANIELS

Gov. Mitch Daniels will tour flooded areas in Lake County this morning, according to his spokeswoman Jane Jankowski.

He will start at Chesterton Town Hall at 8 a.m., and continue to Munster High School at about 10:30 a.m., according to his press office.

Daniels will meet with first responders for an update and will make a ground tour and an aerial tour of affected areas. In the meantime, state Homeland Security officials will work in the area to compile a damage assessment, to strengthen Indiana's case for federal disaster aid.

"There's no doubt in his mind we will qualify, based on the reports he has been getting," Jankowski said. "But Homeland Security wants to gather all the information it can so when we do make the call we have the strongest case possible."

State Rep. Dan Stevenson, D-Highland, called on Daniels Monday to suspend toll payments at the Westpoint toll plaza near Hammond, to ease congestion there as vehicles avoid the flooding on the Borman Expressway. Stevenson also requested that Daniels ask Illinois state officials to suspend tolls on the Chicago Skyway leading into Indiana until flood waters recede.

"After the torrential rains this past weekend, there are substantial sections of the Borman Expressway and several other critical arteries in Illinois and Indiana that are closed to due to high waters," Stevenson said in a news release. "As a result, all motorists are using the Indiana Toll Road and the Chicago Skyway to get to work. Because these roads are both tolled, drivers are facing substantial delays in trying to get through the gates. In some cases, I have been told that the lines of traffic are more than three miles long."

Jankowski said the Indiana Toll Road Concession Co., which has run the Toll Road since a private consortium leased it from the state, is considering suspending tolls. But she said Daniels has received reports that the delays at Westpoint are not severe enough to justify him stepping in and insisting the tolls be suspended.

DRUNK DRIVING

Heavy rain and flooded streets did not seem to deter drinkers from driving over the weekend, and several were involved in crashes as a result.

Kevin Hoffman, 36, of Valparaiso was arrested for drunken driving after reportedly striking a utility pole and the squad car of an officer directing traffic around flooding just before 9 p.m. Sunday at Vale Park and Silhavy roads in Valparaiso.

Both drivers involved in a 8:30 p.m. Saturday crash at Meridian Road and County Road 700N had been drinking, police said. Neither driver was able to say in which direction he had been driving before the crash.

Willie Hopper, 25, of Valparaiso, and Aaron Kratochvil, 26, of Hobart, were arrested for drunken driving.

The driver and passenger of a pickup were injured when it crashed at 3 a.m. Saturday into a ditch along U.S. 6, west of County Road 400E.

Jeffrey Grecco, 34, of Westville, complained of shoulder pain and possibly a broken foot; he failed a breath test and will be charged with drunken driving, according to the police report.

Passenger Erica Perez, 20, of Portage, was treated for a possible broken arm. Keith Rhodes, 21, of Portage, was arrested for drunken driving after being in a single-vehicle crash at 3 a.m. Sunday in the area of County Roads 200W and 900N.

AREA HOSPITALS

Despite raging water levels in much of Munster, meanwhile, Community Hospital in Munster was not affected by the flooding that devastated the north side of town, said hospital spokeswoman Mylinda Cane.

The hospital did accept some patients from Munster Med-Inn after the facility was evacuated due to rising water. The hospital also assisted with provisions for the shelter set up at Munster High School on Sunday.

"We sent over cots, blankets and food to help people who were affected by the floods," Cane said. "Some of them are still there today."

St. Margaret Mercy in Dyer and Hammond were operating normally Monday following the deluge of rain over the weekend.

"There were no flooding issues, definitely nothing like we had in 2007," said Maria Ramos, spokeswoman for the hospitals.

In August 2007, the first floor of the Dyer campus flooded after Plum Creek breached its banks. The 2007 flood damaged nearly 200,000 square feet of the facility, including the emergency room. Repair work cost more than \$10 million.

Ramos said everyone at the hospital has been on alert and watching very closely. The earthen berms and cement barriers installed as part of the reconstruction process have worked, she said.

At St. Anthony Medical Center in Crown Point, while many of its employees could not make it to work, the hospital campus had not been affected directly by flood waters, said spokesman Bob Corbin.

"What has impacted us most is a fair amount of staff not being able to make it into the hospital," Corbin said.

The hospital also could not discharge some patients, some of which would have gone to Munster Med-Inn, which was evacuated due to flooding.

Corbin said St. Anthony's could not assist in the evacuation of Munster Med-Inn because the facility is almost at capacity and running short-staffed. Corbin said the hospital has seen a spike in the number of people coming into the emergency room and some of those visits do appear to be related to flooding.

Reporters contributing to this report include: Christin Nance Lazerus, Carole Carlson, Lori Caldwell, Erik Potter, Carrie Napoleon, Diane Krieger Spivak, Jane Huh, Teresa Auch Schultz, Erin Guerra, James D. Wolf Jr.

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State disaster declaration likely days away

BY

PATRICK

GUINANE

pguinane@nwi.com

317.637.9078 | Monday, September 15, 2008

INDIANAPOLIS | A spokeswoman for Gov. Mitch Daniels says it will take "a few days" for the Indiana to announce a disaster declaration for parts of Northwest Indiana inundated by weekend rains.

"We have not made any disaster declaration at this point," Daniels Press Secretary Jane Jankowski said shortly after 3 p.m. Monday. "We just want to make sure that we get all the information put together first, thorough the (Indiana) Department of Homeland Security."

Joe Wainscott, the state homeland security director, flew over the region Monday morning to take an initial assessment of the flood damage. Jankowski said the governor is almost certain that at least some areas of Northwest Indiana will be declared state disaster areas, a move that could open the door to federal assistance.

"They'll probably need to let the water go down first to finish assessing the damage" she said.

Jankowski said Daniels plans to tour the region on Tuesday. Details of visit remain pending.

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Post-Tribune

FEMA coming to visit; Porter County bridges need closer look

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/porter/1167885.pccommish.article>)

September 17, 2008

By James D. Wolf Jr. Post-Tribune correspondent

VALPARAISO -- The aftermath of the weekend flood was felt at the Porter County Commissioners meeting Tuesday as they heard that bridges needed inspections and that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is coming Thursday.

This will be round 1 for FEMA, which is mostly visiting Lake County, Porter County Emergency Management Director Phil Griffith said.

Those interested in FEMA help should fill out an Indiana Department of Homeland Security flood damage questionnaire, available at www.in.gov/

dhs or at the emergency management office, 1995 S. Indiana 2, he said.

People can drop off the forms at his office or fax them to 465-3598.

Those who can't do so before Thursday won't need to worry as FEMA representatives will return.

The need for bridge inspections is to see what kind of damage some of them have taken from pile ups of debris rammed against them in the storm, Highway Supervisor Al Hoagland said.

The commissioners approved his going ahead to see what money could be needed.

"I don't know how many bridges yet because we're not done flooding in the south, yet," he said.

He estimates it could cost close to \$20,000 to have licensed engineers look them over, but that won't include underwater checks.

Part of the problem is that gas pipelines cross rivers close to bridges and trees get wedged. Something has to break, and it could be the tree, the bridge struts or the pipeline, Hoagland explained.

"For the safety of everyone involved, we ought to inspect them," he said.

Also at the meeting, the commissioners rejected three bids for private companies that want to run the animal shelter.

The bids came in two weeks ago, and the lowest was \$350,000, much more than planned, Commissioner Bob Harper said.

The commissioners will scale down the plan and look for more economical alternatives.

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Chesterton Tribune.

By KEVIN NEVERS

Gov. Mitch Daniels had one crucial message for Dunelanders when he visited the Chesterton town hall this morning: If you sustained flood damage, you must report it to the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

As Daniels explained to Chesterton officials, federal assistance—in the form of grants and loans—is based on “a county-wide threshold” of damage. And so while this or that very localized area of a given county damage might have incurred extensive, even catastrophic, damage, the rest of the county might not have and thus cumulatively the threshold is not reached.

Every single report of flood damage, therefore, increases the chances that Porter County will receive some level of federal assistance.

Daniels accordingly urged Dunelanders to complete a DHS “Flood Damage Questionnaire” and return it to the Porter County Emergency Management Agency (PCEMA) at 1995 S. Ind. 2. The document may be downloaded at http://www.in.gov/dhs/files/damage_quest.doc

The document is a single page in length and is easy to complete, asks residents chiefly to check a few yes-or-no questions, and seeks salient information on the degree of damage sustained. The documents will also be available at the Chesterton town hall and residents may mail or hand-deliver them there at 726 Broadway, Chesterton, IN 46304, and be assured that they will be forwarded to the proper authority.

The document itself makes one thing clear: it is not an application for any assistance program. Assistance, if it comes, will come later, Chesterton Town Attorney Chuck Lukmann noted, after an individual assessment of damage is conducted by a Federal Emergency Management Agency official in response to the Flood Damage Questionnaire. It’s “vital,” then, for residents to complete and submit the form and to do so as quickly as possible, Lukmann said.

For their parts Chesterton Town Council Member Sharon Darnell, D-4th, and Portage Mayor Olga Vasquez encouraged all municipalities in Porter County to name a point person who can begin making his or her own drive-by assessments and personally communicating to residents the importance of submitting the Flood Damage Questionnaire. In the matter of federal assistance, Darnell and Vasquez said, Porter County will stand or fall depending on each municipality’s ability to mobilize its residents.

Daniels Listens

Daniels arrived at the Chesterton town hall shortly after 8 a.m., his first stop today on a tour of flood sites in Northwest Indiana. DHS is still in “response mode,” he told

municipal officials, but is preparing to begin damage assessment so as to apply as quickly as possible for federal assistance. That application will depend in large part on the Flood Damage Questionnaires submitted by residents, Daniels said.

Daniels then took time to examine photographs of the flooding in Chesterton provided by municipal officials and ask a few questions.

Has there been anything like looting in the wake of the flood? he wondered. Police Chief George Nelson said there has not been. Darnell intimated that a person would have to be pretty foolish to try to loot in Chesterton. “There’s enough citizen interaction to take care of that,” she said. “That hasn’t been an issue.”

Do residents have flood insurance? Daniels ventured. Some residents, those who live in a formally designated flood plain, do have it, Lukmann replied. But certainly not everyone in town does.

“Is there anything you need here you don’t have?” Daniels also asked. “Water? Food? Shelter?” So far as that kind of thing goes, officials told him, we’re all good.

Have the appropriate state agencies responded and “did they work together?” Daniels asked finally. Street Commissioner John Schnadenberg said that the town has worked very closely with PCEMA Director Phil Griffith.

Town Council Member Emerson DeLaney, R-5th, did take a moment to praise municipal staff and employees for their response over the weekend. “Our people worked non-stop,” he said. “It was go-go-go.”

“Public employees get overlooked sometimes,” Daniels responded. “When these things happen, I always remind people, ‘I hope you don’t overlook them again.’”

Homage to Heroes

On leaving the Chesterton town hall, Daniels was scheduled next to pay his respects to the Thanos family on the loss of John Thanos, 74, and his son Mark Thanos, 48, who drowned on Sunday in a ditch in Westchester South after leaping into the raging waters to rescue a 10-year-old boy who was sucked into a 36-inch culvert beneath Olivia Court.

Daniels noted that at least five Hoosiers died over the weekend in Southern Indiana in weather-related accidents. “Trees and wind,” he said. “Down south it was pure acts of God. But here these men died trying to do the right thing.”

“It’s just a miracle,” he added, that the boy survived. “If they’d only known, they’d be okay.”

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Post-Tribune

Response to flooding was impressive effort

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/opinion/1164988.edit.article>)

September 16, 2008

It seems Northwest Indiana is going to have to begin preparing for a 100-year rain every 12 months. That's what has happened of late.

Judging by the response to the torrential rains and resulting floods over the weekend, it's apparent an extensive amount of preparation has been taking place.

While the majority of the region spent the weekend at home and dry, there were hundreds of responders from a host of agencies rescuing flood victims and stranded motorists, sandbagging to protect others and directing frustrated motorists to passable roads.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security coordinated the efforts of the Indiana State Police, the National Guard, the Department of Natural Resources and the Indiana Department of Transportation. Perhaps those who deserve the greatest praise are the front-line local law enforcement officials dispatched by the myriad of towns and cities in Northwest Indiana.

The key to the entire effort was that agencies on all levels communicated. That hasn't always been the case in terms of storm response in Northwest Indiana.

That doesn't mean everything went smoothly. While that always is a goal, the perfect storm response is difficult to achieve. For instance, eastbound motorists on Interstate 80/94 were stranded for hours between Torrence Avenue in Illinois and Calumet Avenue in Indiana. That is unacceptable in this day and age. Where were the emergency responders? Weren't the Illinois and Indiana state police communicating? Why did the Illinois State Police continue to allow motorists to enter that abyss rather than stopping them before the bottleneck?

Perhaps all involved should convene in the next few weeks to talk about the problems. But mostly they should be proud of an outstanding response under difficult circumstances.

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September 17, 2008

Daniels declares disaster emergency for Lake and Porter counties

Daniels issues disaster declaration; hundreds have had to flee homes

By Vic Ryckaert
vic.ryckaert@indystar.com

Gov. Mitch Daniels declared a disaster emergency Tuesday for a portion of Northwest Indiana inundated by floodwaters.

Hundreds of residents in the region were still in shelters, and highways remained impassable as crews piled sandbags and used pumps to clear water off the streets.

Floodwaters closed I-80/94 in Lake County and I-65 in Jasper and Lake counties, and all traffic headed to and from Chicago was diverted to other highways Tuesday.

Joshua Bingham, a spokesman for the Indiana Department of Transportation's LaPorte district, said last weekend's 8-inch rainfall caused a levee failure along the Little Calumet River.

"Even before the levees breached, we had pumps out there trying to keep the water off the highways," he said. "When a breach happens, there's not much you can do."

Sandbagging efforts continued in the Hammond area, Bingham said, noting that no one is sure when the roads will reopen.

In Munster, officials issued a mandatory evacuation order for flooded areas. Many residents sought shelter at Munster High School.

Sophie Stepniewski, 87, was among the hundreds of people forced to abandon flooded homes in Porter and Lake counties. The Munster woman boarded a canoe Monday to leave her home of 41 years.

"I've never seen a moment such as this," she said.

Officials in Jasper, Lake and Porter counties in Northwest Indiana and in Harrison, Jefferson, Martin and Perry counties in Southern Indiana have declared states of emergency.

"It's going to be a long road to get things cleared out," said John Erickson, spokesman for the Indiana Department of Homeland Security. "It seems the water recedes in one area and comes back in another."

Daniels signed the disaster order while visiting residents in Northwest Indiana on Tuesday. The move means the state Department of Homeland Security, which is coordinating assistance in the area, can take needed actions to provide expanded emergency services. The next step will be to formally request assistance from the federal government, state officials said.

In Central Indiana, power remained out for hundreds of homes and businesses Tuesday.

Indianapolis Power & Light Co. repair crews have worked nonstop to restore power to more than 55,000 homes and businesses cut off by storm damage Sunday. About 400 customers remained without power as of 11 p.m. Tuesday, IPL spokeswoman Crystal Livers-Powers said.

Locally, the biggest problem was fallen trees and downed power lines. About 270 IPL workers have been making repairs since Sunday.

"We're making pretty good progress for the kind of damage we had," Livers-Powers said. Getting everyone reconnected could take until Thursday, she said.

Tuesday afternoon, Duke Energy reported more than 84,000 homes and businesses were still without power in the roughly 60 counties it serves, including 114 customers in Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Madison, Rush and Shelby counties. Duke reported more than 359,000 outages Sunday.

Call Star reporter Vic Ryckaert at (317) 444-2761.

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Travel, Power, Flooding Woes Drag On

Thousands Still Without Power Days After Storm

POSTED: 9:43 am EDT September 17, 2008

UPDATED: 10:13 am EDT September 17, 2008

INDIANAPOLIS -- The effects of extreme weather on both ends of Indiana have left thousands of people without power, facing fuel and water shortages, while others cope with severe flooding. Power is the problem in southeastern Indiana, where some won't get power back until this weekend. The remains of Hurricane Ike tore through Indiana on Sunday with widespread damaging winds and a swath of up to a foot of rain.

Jennings County Emergency Management Director Michelle Evans said Wednesday that about 80 percent of her rural county still has no electricity, and 700 to 800 residents in two townships have no water.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security said most of the gas stations in Dearborn County have run out of fuel and that Jennings County also is running low on fuel and is rationing it.

IDHS officials said more than 100,000 residents and businesses still don't have power four days after the storm. Telephone service has been restored to most customers.

Duke Energy reported that it has more than 68,000 customers in the dark in central and southern Indiana.

Major Roads Still Closed In Northwestern Indiana

The Indiana Toll Road has temporarily waived some tolls near the Illinois state line to help with traffic caused by other flooded highways.

The Indiana Department of Transportation said crews are having trouble clearing water from Interstate 80/94 because part of the flooded Little Calumet River runs parallel to the highway. Spokesman Andy Dietrick said it's unclear when the highway will reopen. Once the water recedes and roads are dry, engineers will check the structural integrity of the roads, bridges and overpasses. Interstate 65 also remains closed from U.S. 24 in Remington north to I-80/94 from the weekend storm.

Signs along I-65 in the Indianapolis area urged travelers headed to Chicago to use Interstate 74 west of Indianapolis to Interstate 57 in Illinois -- a detour that adds hours to a normally three to four-hour trip.

Gov. Mitch Daniels declared a state of disaster in flooded Lake and Porter counties Tuesday after surveying waterlogged communities by air and boat.

Daniels got a close look at northwest Indiana's flood damage as he toured the region in the hours before Tuesday night's gubernatorial debate in Merrillville with Democrat Jill Long Thompson and Libertarian Andy Horning.

In Chesterton, near Lake Michigan, Daniels visited relatives of two men who died in the weekend flooding that followed up to a foot of rain delivered by the remnants of Hurricane Ike.

He encouraged residents to report water damage in hopes of receiving federal assistance.

"It's really important not to miss anything," he told officials at the Chesterton Town Hall. The governor's office later announced that Daniels had declared a state of disaster emergency, which would allow the IDHS to help provide expanded emergency services. The next step would be to request federal aid, the statement said. Homeland Security Director Joseph Wainscott Jr. said teams were expected to arrive in the area Wednesday to determine if damage has reached the threshold required for financial assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide assistance to homeowners and municipalities. He said it already appears likely the area will qualify for disaster assistance in the form of low cost loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

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September 16, 2008

Governor declares disaster in floods

By *THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

MUNSTER - Gov. Mitch Daniels declared a state of disaster in flooded Lake and Porter counties today after surveying waterlogged communities by air and boat.

Daniels got a close look at northwest Indiana's flood damage as he toured the region in the hours before tonight's gubernatorial debate in Merrillville with Democrat Jill Long Thompson and Libertarian Andy Horning.

In Chesterton, near Lake Michigan, Daniels visited relatives of two men who died in the weekend flooding that followed up to a foot of rain delivered by the remnants of Hurricane Ike.

He encouraged residents to report water damage in hopes of receiving federal assistance.

"It's really important not to miss anything," he told officials at the Chesterton Town Hall.

The governor's office later announced that Daniels had declared a state of disaster emergency, which would allow the Indiana Department of Homeland Security to help provide expanded emergency services.

The next step would be to request federal aid, the statement said. Homeland Security Director Joseph Wainwright Jr. said teams were expected to arrive in the area Wednesday to determine if damage has reached the threshold required for financial assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide assistance to both homeowners and municipalities.

He said it already appears likely the area will qualify for disaster assistance in the form of low cost loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The deluge of rain - up to a foot in some areas - left northern Indiana road crews working for a third straight day to pump water from swamped lanes of Interstate 80/94. Interstate 65 also remained closed from U.S. 24 in Remington north to I-80/94 three days after the storm.

Andy Dietrick, a spokesman for the state Department of Transportation, said crews were having trouble clearing water from I-80/94 because part of the flooded Little Calumet River runs parallel to the highway.

Dietrick said it's unclear when the highway might reopen. Once the water recedes and roads are dry, engineers will check the structural integrity of the roads, bridges and overpasses.

Chesterton Street Commissioner John Schnadenberg said today that three subdivisions in the city of 12,000 near Lake Michigan were still mired in street and yard flooding.

Schnadenberg said that between Friday afternoon and Sunday evening, the city's sewer plant recorded just over 12 inches of rain - what he called an "incredible" deluge.

While northern Indiana struggled with floodwaters, central and southern Indiana were dealing with power outages that followed high winds from the remnants of Hurricane Ike.

As of 4 p.m. today, more than 100,000 homes and businesses remained without power, but phone service had been restored statewide, Homeland Security said.

Duke Energy, the state's largest power provider, had more than 80,000 customers without power in its territory in central and southern Indiana. Vectren, which serves southern Indiana, had more than 10,000 customers without power.

In southern Indiana, Greater Clark County school officials said that schools would remain closed until Monday, but they were making two facilities available as shelters for residents without power or whose homes were damaged.

Jeffersonville's fire department gave away bags of ice to those still without electricity, while Charlestown imposed a sunset-to-sunrise curfew.

In Monroe County, one of the areas hardest hit by power failures, Stinesville resident Scott McGlocklin threw in the towel.

McGlocklin said the lights went out at his home about 5:30 p.m. Sunday and that Duke Energy had told him power might not be restored until Saturday.

"I'm not happy," McGlocklin said. "I'm going to a hotel. I'm not doing it."

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Post-Tribune

Daniels measures flood damage

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/1167789.flood-gov.article>)

September 17, 2008

By John Byrne Post-Tribune staff writer

MUNSTER -- Lamenting the weather woes that have crushed Northwest Indiana recently, Gov. Mitch Daniels on Tuesday urged residents to catalogue the destruction left by heavy rains and flooding to help get aid for cleanup.

A home-by-home list of structural damage in Munster, Hammond, Chesterton and elsewhere is the best way to secure the most comprehensive federal grants, Daniels said as he toured flooded areas in Lake and Porter counties Tuesday by helicopter and by boat.

Daniels signed an executive order Tuesday declaring a disaster emergency for the two counties, a move supported by U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky and other members of the state's congressional delegation.

While the declaration will give the Department of Homeland Security expanded power to provide assistance, it will not guarantee federal money. That will be dictated by the amount of destruction.

"I'm confident the threshold for (Small Business Administration) low-interest loans will be met," Daniels said while slogging through the muck where floodwaters had recently receded west of Hart Ditch.

"The question is whether we will qualify for FEMA assistance -- which can be in the form of cash -- as well."

"I think Indiana has been picked on enough, this area in particular," Daniels said outside Munster High School, where he met with residents in the auditorium.

The governor said downstate flooding in June has made the state's Homeland Security department adept at helping residents quickly apply for aid from various agencies.

"There's no way to make this anything but awful and difficult, we know that," Daniels said. "We're just going to break our backs to be as quick and helpful to you as we can be."

To qualify for individual assistance, hundreds of homes must be either seriously damaged or destroyed.

To qualify for public assistance, there must be at least \$10.5 million in damage to the public infrastructure.

Both assessments are made on a county-by-county basis, so Lake and Porter counties must meet the federal standards individually.

Contact John Byrne at 648-3072 or jbyrne@post-trib.com. Comment on this story at post-trib.com.

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Governor declares disaster in flooded cities

Associated Press - September 16, 2008 6:04 PM ET

MUNSTER, Ind. (AP) - The governor has declared a state of disaster in flooded Lake and Porter counties.

Governor Mitch Daniels toured the area by boat and air today. In Chesterton, Daniels also visited relatives of 2 men who died in the flooding over the weekend. He encouraged residents to report water damage in hopes of receiving federal assistance.

The governor's declaration of disaster emergency means the Indiana Department of Homeland Security may help provide expanded emergency services. The next step would be to request federal aid.

Homeland Security Director Joseph Wainscott says teams are expected to arrive in the area tomorrow to determine if damage has reached the threshold required for financial assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He says it already appears likely the area will qualify for disaster assistance in the form of low cost loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

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Wind storm claims two lives in Clark County

By MATT THACKER

Matt.Thacker@newsandtribune.com - September 16, 2008 11:43 am

— Two people are dead, others injured, and tens of thousands are without power as people are left to clean up damage left by the remnants of Hurricane Ike in Clark County.

Amy L. Rader, 36, of Memphis, and Francis Eickholtz, 62, of Charlestown, both died from blunt-force trauma, said Clark County Coroner Edwin “Huck” Coots.

Eickholtz was standing in his yard along the 900 block of Monroe Street when he was struck by a falling branch Sunday evening and was pronounced dead at St. Catherine Regional Hospital about 7:40 p.m.

Maj. Chuck Adams of the Clark County Sheriff’s Department said Rader’s death was a “freak accident” and not directly related to the storm. She was at a friend’s home off of Columbus-Mann Road in Memphis. Her friend had just cut down a tree when another tree that was partially dead fell and struck her, Adams said. She died about 11:50 a.m. Monday at Clark Memorial Hospital.

Adams said another woman was seriously injured after a tree fell on her vehicle near the fire tower at the Clark County State Forest in Henryville. Another woman reportedly had serious injuries in Jeffersonville after being hit by falling debris.

As of 9 a.m. today, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security was reporting 19 storm-related injuries and seven fatalities in Indiana.

Adams said a take-home police car for the Sheriff’s Department also was damaged by a fallen tree at an officer’s house.

James Vittitoe, who recently started his own contracting company, said he made a lot of money Sunday night, but had to work on his own home Monday. A tree had been uprooted, and a large branch fell from another tree causing damage to the house, which is on East Eighth Street in Jeffersonville.

“The trees alone are probably \$800, then there’s a limb stuck through the roof, and you have the shingles, siding damage and the fence is knocked down. It’s going to cost a lot,” he said.

On the 600 block of Chippewa Drive, one tree damaged two houses and a truck and crushed a car that was parked in a driveway.

“It sounded like a cannon going off,” said T.J. Helms. “Pictures were coming off the walls. It was like an earthquake.”

The tree totaled Helms’ 1997 Lincoln Town Car and caused slight damage to his pickup truck and house. It also caused extensive damage to the second floor of his neighbor’s house.

Elaine Vanhorn’s garage along the 400 block of East Terrace Heights was crushed after a tree fell in her yard. She believes the garage is completely destroyed, but her 1991 Corvette inside was spared. As of Monday afternoon, a section of the tree was hanging on a power line in Vanhorn’s back yard.

“Everyone’s concern is, how much can that power line take,” she said.

She said she had reported it to Duke Energy Co., but they had not been out to her house. Even with the problems, she was thankful for the help of her neighbors.

“We have a great neighborhood,” she said. “Everybody’s pitched in and helped everybody else.” Barbara Bridgwater, who lives on the 3700 block of Scottsville Road in Floyds Knobs, echoed those thoughts. She said she returned home about five minutes after a tree crashed into her house. “Someone actually pulled in my driveway in front of me to make sure no one was in the house and injured,” she said. “People have been stopping by to see if they can help. This brings out the good in people.”

She did not know how much the damage would cost.

Marie Huth, who also lives on Scottsville Road, said she had lived in that home for 52 years.

“I have never seen wind like that before,” she said. “We were really lucky to not have more damage.”

The Clark County Red Cross was taking in people without power at the First Christian Church of Jeffersonville at 3209 Middle Road. The Red Cross decided this morning to close the shelter.

Lorie Nevils, chairperson of the kitchen ministry for the church, said the church had 23 volunteers, and the Red Cross had about 15. She said they served 81 plates Sunday night and 41 Monday morning.

About 20 people came from Haven House, a local homeless shelter, which was without power.

FOOD AND WATER SAFETY

Health officials are recommending residents affected by the recent wind storms follow the following guidelines for food and water safety during disasters.

Power outages

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours, and a half-full freezer will keep temperature for approximately 24 hours, if the door remains closed. Refrigerated food should not be warmer than 41 degrees, and frozen food should be frozen. Do not refreeze perishables.
- Buy dry or block ice to keep refrigerators as cold as possible during prolonged power outages. Fifty pounds of dry ice will keep an 18-cubic foot, fully-stocked freezer cold for two days, or a half-stocked freezer of the same size cold for one day.

Drinking water

- Purchase commercially bottled water or seek water at local shelters. During a boil water advisory you may disinfect your water 2 ways:
- Chlorination: add six drops of liquid chlorine household bleach to one gallon of water and mix. Check the label to ensure that the active ingredient, sodium hypochlorite, is 5.25 percent. Wait 30 minutes after adding chlorine before using water for drinking or cooking purposes.
- Boiling: The water may also be purified by boiling. Bring water to a full boil for at least five minutes. Cool and aerate the boiled water by pouring it through the air from one clean container to another, or mixing rapidly with a clean whisk.

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THE SHELBYVILLE NEWS

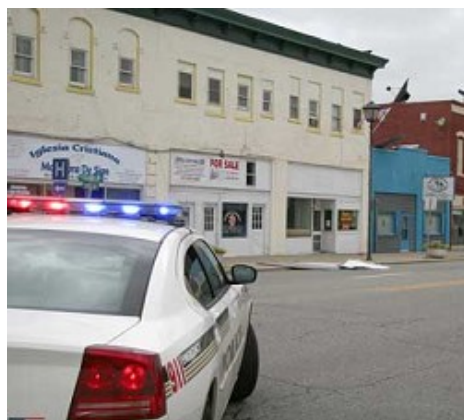
SHELBYVILLE, INDIANA A NEWSPAPER FOR ALL THE PEOPLE SHELBYNEWS.COM

Monday, September 15, 2008

Ike's remnants strike area

Bettina Puckett
Staff Writer

Monday, September 15, 2008



A Shelbyville police cruiser blocks traffic from entering Public Square from North Harrison Street on Sunday afternoon because of falling debris and a bank sign that was threatening to topple. **Dayla Thurston**

now," she said Sunday evening.

"Statewide, the problems will not be resolved (on Monday)," she said. "We're looking at multiple days of power restoration."

Meanwhile, RushShelby Energy also reported outages in Shelby County from the strong late-summer winds.

"There are widespread outages, due to the winds and trees down," said David Toll, a spokesman for Rush-Shelby Energy.

Toll said that crews were working on the problems, but he had no numbers available at 5:20 p.m. regarding how many of the co-op's customers were affected.

As the fierce winds blew in, many Shelby County residents watched nervously as large trees swayed in the gusts.

The remnants of what was Hurricane Ike blew into Shelby County Sunday afternoon, producing damaging winds of more than 50 mph.

Strong wind gusts felled trees, downed power lines, tore shingles from roofs, ripped signs from their foundations and resulted in more than 4,000 people being without electricity by late afternoon.

"We've had significant damage," said Angeline Protogere, a spokeswoman for Duke Energy Indiana.

More than 230,000 Duke customers in Indiana were without power on Sunday, but by 5:30 p.m., that number had dropped to 187,000. "(The outages) are primarily due to the winds," she said.

"In Shelbyville, we have about 4,000 customers out," Protogere said. Earlier in the day, that number was 4,100.

"We are looking at a significant storm and significant damage," Protogere said.

Power to Major Hospital also was cut off Sunday afternoon, according to police radio communications. The hospital reportedly was being powered by a generator. Crews from Duke were dispatched to the hospital early Sunday evening in an attempt to restore service.

Protogere could not say when electric power would be restored. "I don't have an estimate right

Around 4:30 p.m., a high gust of 53 mph was reported at the Shelbyville Municipal Airport, said Logan Johnson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Indianapolis.

Later, around 5:40 p.m., gusts of about 35 mph were still being reported. "The storm is all the way up in Detroit, so it is moving out of here quickly," Johnson said.

Only a trace of rain was reported Sunday in Shelby County, he said.

"These winds are all from the remnants of Ike," Johnson said.

Although Ike was no longer categorized as a hurricane, or even a tropical storm, that did not mean the storm could not produce strong winds.

"The storm is not organized any more," said Johnson, who expected the strong winds to leave the central Indiana area by 7 or 8 p.m. Sunday.

Elsewhere in the state, high wind and rain caused widespread power outages and forced an early end to a motorcycle race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Duke Energy reported about 163,000 customers without power in much of the southern half of the state as of about 4 p.m., including 27,000 in Clark County and 23,000 in Floyd County along the Ohio River.

The inaugural Red Bull Indianapolis GP was halted eight laps from the finish because of heavy rain and wind. Two fans were injured when a tent collapsed on the infield of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, but their injuries were not life-threatening.

"It felt like hurricane conditions because we had to turn sideways because we were getting hit so hard with rain," said Jeff Bunch of Louisville, Ky. "The gusts were coming up pretty strong, probably 60 mph."

The National Weather Service issued a wind advisory for the Indianapolis area after a 63 mph gust was reported.

Indianapolis Power and Light spokesman Matthew McCardle blamed the wind for outages that at one point left 15,000 customers without power in the city.

The weather took a deadly toll in northern Indiana.

Flooding was blamed for two deaths in northern Indiana on Sunday, and heavy rains sent the Little Calumet River over a levee and prompted the evacuations of hundreds of homes in northwest Indiana.

Two men apparently drowned Sunday morning while trying to help a group of children out of swift water in a ditch in a Chesterton subdivision, Fire Chief Warren Highwood said. The men, a father and son, were believed to be related to one of the children. None of the children were injured, he said.

The Porter County coroner was investigating the deaths in the town about 35 miles southeast of Chicago and the men's identities were not immediately released.

Munster residents were ordered evacuated from about 700 homes Sunday because of floodwaters going into their basements, and others in the area were warned they might have to leave, Town Manager Tom DeGiulio said.

"The town came out a while ago and started going door-to-door," Munster resident Mark Porte told The Times of Munster. "It's four feet deep out in the street."

DeGiulio said natural gas service in some neighborhoods was turned off as a precaution, and it likely would be several days before evacuees could return.

He called the flooding the worst he's seen in 25 years in Munster.

"We've never had flooding like this," DeGiulio said.

By Sunday morning, Valparaiso had received 8.4 inches of rain in the previous 48 hours and the cities of Porter, LaPorte and South Bend, 7.7 inches, the National Weather Service said. Portage, Chesterton and Kouts each had received more than 7 inches, and most areas in northwest and north-central Indiana had received at least 5 inches.

DeGiulio said Munster had some small breaches in the levee along the Little Calumet River, but no breaks.

"It's come over in a couple of spots, but it hasn't been a collapse of the levee," he said.

The river, which was 5 feet over flood stage Sunday afternoon, was flowing over the levee along a quarter-mile stretch, he said.

The Indiana Department of Transportation said all lanes of Interstate 80/94 were closed for a few miles just west of the Illinois border in Lake County.

In Schererville, south of Munster, about two dozen homes were evacuated on the western side of town, Town Manager Bob Volkmann said. He said the evacuations were not mandatory. The town recommended that anyone with standing water in their living areas leave. An emergency shelter was set up at the town hall.

Schererville doesn't have a river going through it, but several tributary creeks were overflowing, he said.

"This is the worst we've ever seen," he said.

The state dispatched state police dive teams, Department of Natural Resources boat teams and other emergency workers to assist with recovery operations, said Indiana Department of Homeland Security spokesman John Erickson said.

The Associated Press contributed information for this report.

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